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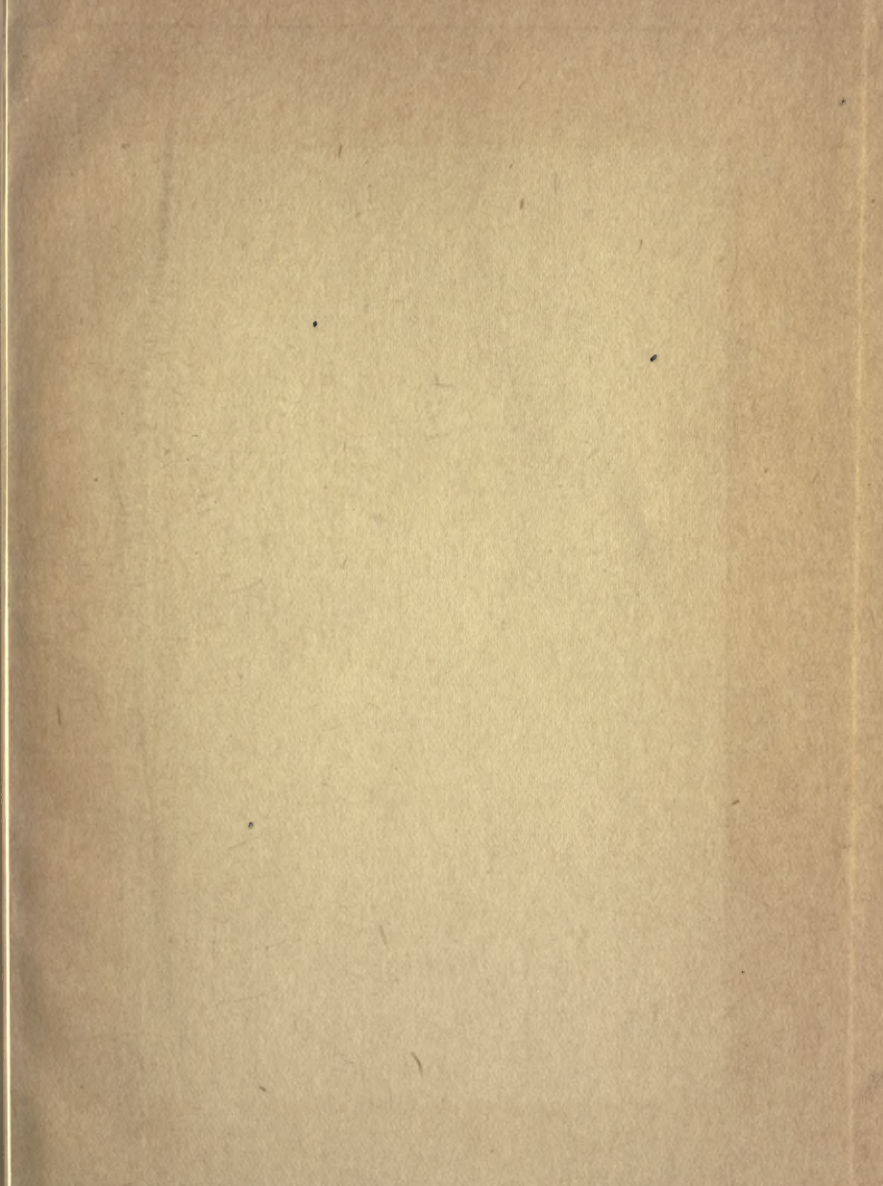
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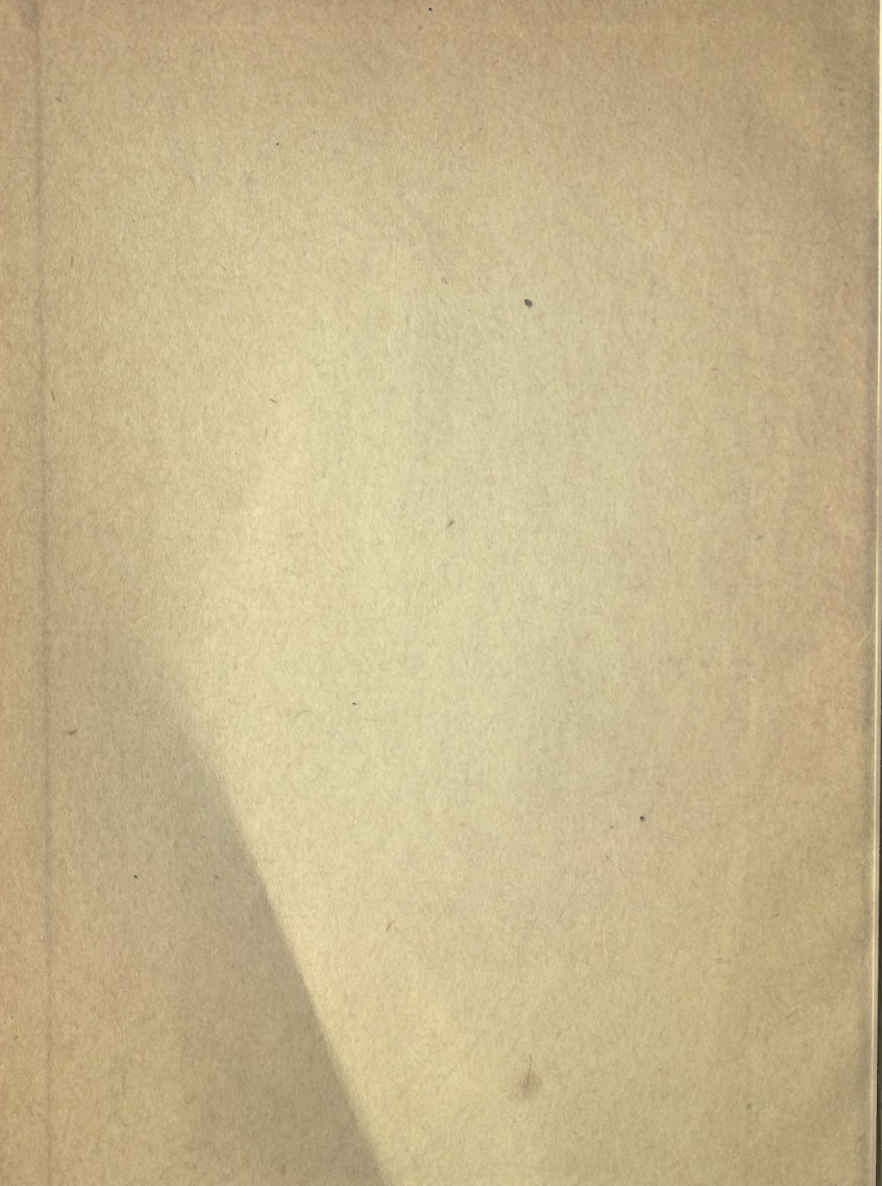
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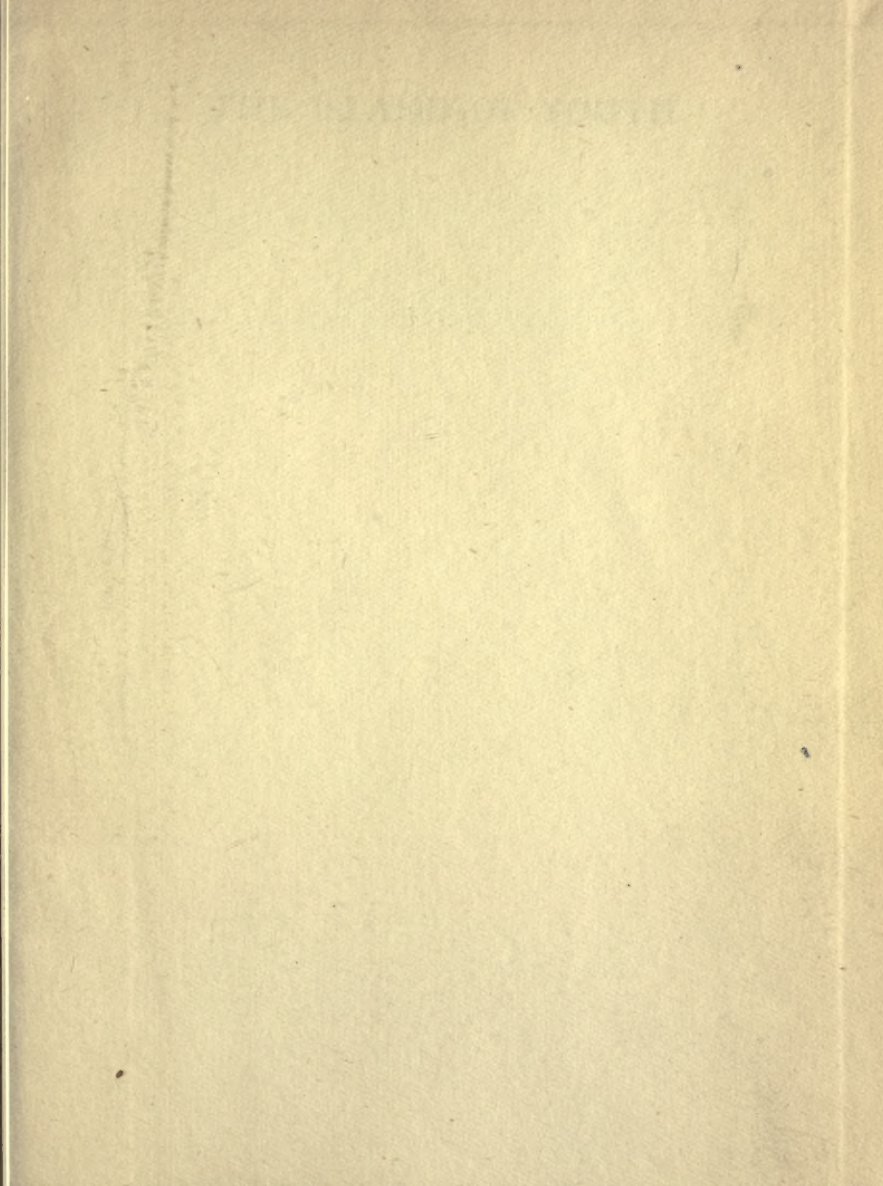
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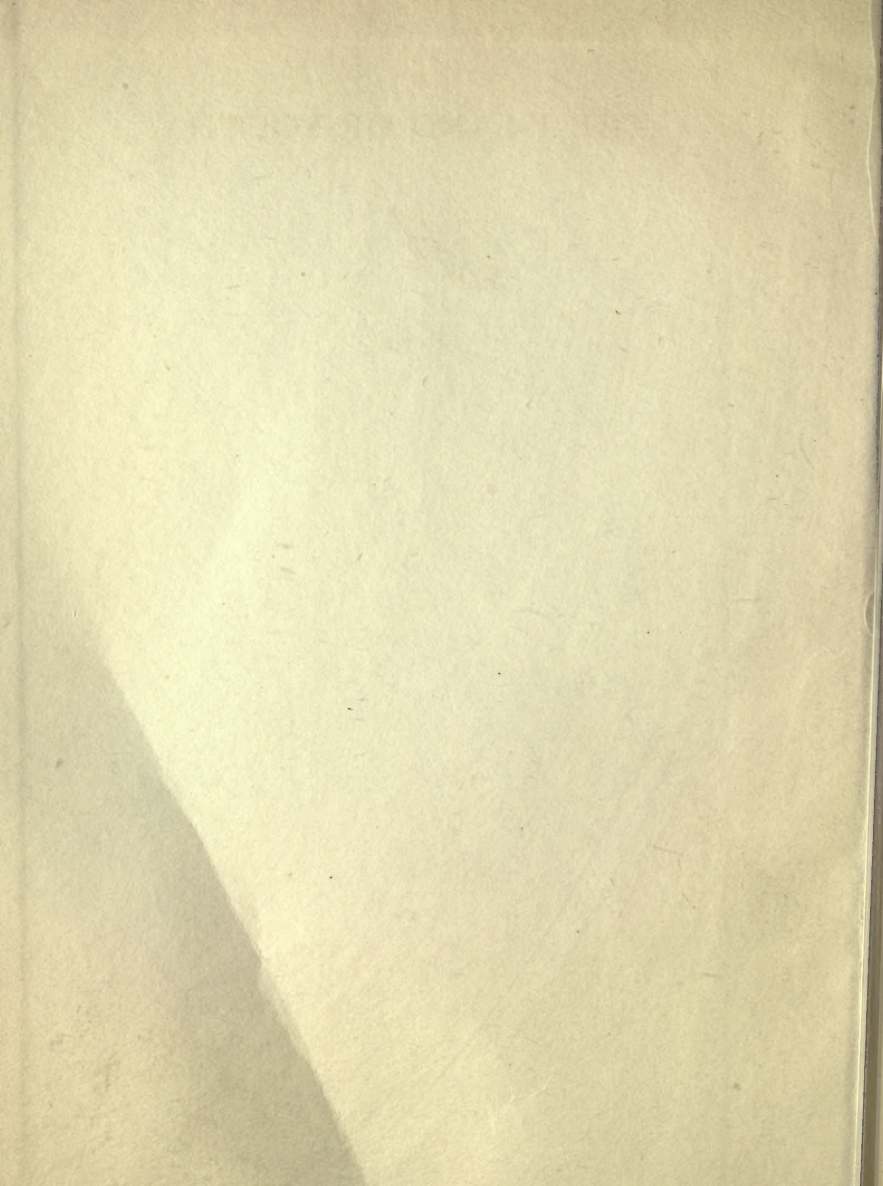
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# THE ISLAND OF YOUTH



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# THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

AND OTHER POEMS

*by*

EDWARD SHANKS



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TO  
EDWARD MARSH



## NOTE

*Many of the shorter pieces in this volume have already appeared in Land and Water, the London Mercury, the New Statesman, the Outlook, the Owl, the Spectator, To-day, and the Westminster Gazette. I am grateful to the Editors of these periodicals, not for permission to reprint, which was not theirs to give, but for having printed my verses in the first place.*

E. S.

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## FIRST PART



# THE ROCK POOL

*To Alice Warrender.*

THIS is the sea. In these uneven walls  
A wave lies prisoned. Far and far away  
Outward to ocean, as the slow tide falls,  
Her sisters through the capes that hold the  
bay  
Dancing in lovely liberty recede.  
Yet lovely in captivity she lies,  
Filled with soft colours, where the waving  
weed  
Moves gently and discloses to our eyes  
Blurred shining veins of rock and lucent shells  
Under the light-shot water; and here  
repose  
Small quiet fish and dimly glowing bells  
Of sleeping sea-anemones that close  
Their tender fronds and will not now awake  
Till on these rocks the waves returning break.



## THE SWIMMERS

THE cove's a shining plate of blue and  
green,  
With darker belts between  
The trough and crest of the lazily rising  
swell,  
And the great rocks throw purple shadows  
down  
Where transient sun-sparks wink and burst  
and drown,  
And the distant glimmering floor of pebble  
and shell  
Is bright or hidden as the shadow wavers,  
And everywhere the restless sun-steeped air  
Trembles and quavers,  
As though it were  
More saturate with light than it could bear.

Now come the swimmers from slow-dripping  
caves,  
Where the shy fern creeps under the veined roof,

And wading out meet with glad breast the  
waves.

One holds aloof,  
And climbs alone the reef with shrinking feet  
That scarce endure the jagged stone's dull  
heat,

Till on the edge he poises  
And flies towards the water, vanishing  
In wreaths of white, with echoing liquid noises,  
And swims beneath, a vague, distorted thing.

Now all the other swimmers leave behind  
The crystal shallow and the foam-wet shore  
And sliding into deeper water find  
A living coolness in the lifting flood:  
Then through their bodies leaps the sparkling  
blood,  
So that they feel the faint earth's drought no  
more.

There now they float, heads raised above the  
green,  
White bodies cloudily seen,

Further and further from the brazen rock  
On which the hot air shakes, on which the tide  
Vainly throws with soundless shock  
The cool and lagging wave. Out, out they go,  
And now upon a mirrored cloud they ride  
Or turning over, with soft strokes and slow,  
Slide on like shadows in a tranquil sky.  
Behind them, on the tall parched cliff, the  
dry

And dusty grasses grow  
In shallow ledges of the arid stone,  
Starving for coolness and the touch of rain.  
But, though to earth they must return again,  
Here come the soft sea airs to meet them,  
blown

Over the surface of the outer deep,  
Scarce moving, staying, falling, straying,  
gone,  
Light and delightful as the touch of sleep. . . .

One wakes and splashes round,  
And magically all the others wake



From their sea-dream, and now with rippling  
sound

Their arms the silence break.

And now again the crystal shallows take

The dripping bodies whose cool hour is  
done:

They pause upon the beach, they pause and  
sigh,

Then vanish in the caverns one by one.

Soon the wet footmarks on the stones are  
dry:

The cove sleeps on beneath the unwavering  
sun.

## MEMORY

**I**N silence and in darkness memory wakes  
Her million sheathèd buds and breaks  
That day-long winter when the light and  
noise  
And hard bleak breath of the outward-looking  
will  
Made barren her tender soil, when every voice  
Of her million airy birds was muffled or still.

One bud-sheath breaks:  
One sudden voice awakes.

What change grew in our hearts seeing one  
night  
That moth-winged ship drifting across the bay,  
Her broad sail dimly white  
On cloudy waters and hills as vague as they?  
Some new thing touched our spirits with  
distant delight,  
Half seen, half noticed, as we loitered down,

Talking in whispers, to the little town,  
Down from the narrow hill  
—Talking in whispers, for the air so still  
Imposed its stillness on our lips and made  
A quiet equal with the equal shade  
That filled the slanting walk. That phantom  
now  
Slides with slack canvas and unwhispering  
prow  
Through the dark sea that this dark room has  
made.

Or the night of the closed eyes will turn to day  
And all day's colours start out of the gray.  
The sun burns on the water. The tall hills  
Push up their shady groves into the sky  
And fail and cease where the intense light  
spills  
Its parching torrent on the gaunt and dry  
Rock of the further mountains, whence the  
snow  
That softened their harsh edges long is gone

And nothing tempers now  
The hot flood falling on the barren stone.

O memory, take and keep  
All that my eyes, your servants, bring you  
home—

Those other days beneath the low white dome  
Of smooth-spread clouds that creep  
As slow and soft as sleep,  
When shade grows pale and the cypress stands  
upright,

Distinct in the cool light,  
Rigid and solid as a dark, hewn stone;

And many another night  
That melts in darkness on the narrow quays  
And changes every colour and every tone  
And soothes the waters to a softer ease,  
When under constellations coldly bright  
The homeward sailors sing their way to bed  
On ships that motionless in harbour float.  
The circling harbour-lights flash green and  
red;



And, out beyond, a steady travelling boat  
Breaking the swell with slow industrious oars  
At each stroke pours  
Pale lighted water from the lifted blade.  
Now in the painted houses all around  
Slow darkening windows call  
The empty unwatched middle of the night.  
The tide's few inches rise without a sound.  
On the black promontory's windless head,  
The last awake, the fireflies rise and fall  
And tangle up their dithering skeins of light.

O memory, take and keep  
All that my eyes, your servants, bring you  
home!

Thick through the changing year  
The unexpected, rich-charged moments come,  
That you twixt wake and sleep  
In the lids of the closed eyes shall make appear.

This is life's certain good,  
Though in the end it be not good at all

When the dark end arises  
And the stripped, startled spirit must let fall  
The amulets that could  
Prevail with life's but not death's sad devices.

Then, like a child from whom an older child  
Forces its gathered treasures,  
Its beads and shells and strings of withered  
flowers,  
Tokens of recent pleasures,  
The soul must lose in eyes weeping and wild  
Those prints of vanished hours.

## IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

WHEN the lamp's guardian flame was out,  
he fell

Through dark abysses full of hollow sound,  
Through caves of sleep that murmured like  
a shell,

Till in night's furthest corridors he found,  
Past any thought or feeling, his escape,  
Where being loses shape,  
Where sorrow melts and merges in profound  
Blackness, that is not pricked by any light.  
There he found rest, how long he could not  
know,

In the deep middle of unfriendly night,  
Safe in his stupor through the to and fro  
Of the slow hours which strike and will not spare.  
But sorrow's pack soon scented that dark lair,  
And as he slept he knew that gradually  
Light grew around him, lifting veil by veil  
The swathings of his hid security,  
Till darkness' self grew pale.

Whither he wandered in that middle land,  
Shining and silent, between sleep and waking,  
How should he tell? But yet he sees them  
stand,

Those calm and carven poplars, rising,  
breaking

Like frozen fountains the still, pearl-pure  
skies,

Sees, but not hears, the soundless aspen  
shaking

Over the long and lichened seat of stone  
Where he awoke. He lifted heedless eyes  
Across the lawns and flower-beds overgrown  
Up to the house that crowned the terraces,  
And down again, and saw the staring pond,  
Lucent and smooth and ringed with irises,  
The tall yew-hedge, the orchard trees be-  
yond. . . .

All this, most strange, was strange beyond  
his care,

For grief attended him,  
Moved like a wind soft fingers in his hair



And with her touch his burning eyes made dim.  
And now his eyes dropped tears, and did not  
see

The glowing house, poised on the soft low  
sky,

The rich warm flowers that nodded silently  
Around him, or the birds in bush and tree  
That moved as noiseless as the clouds. But  
soon

Across the hush of that too quiet noon  
Something unseen yet drew his misty gaze  
To look for what he guessed not. So there  
came

Softly towards him through the garden ways  
A girl in white. Like an unreal flame  
A golden pattern played upon her dress,  
Which as he stared at her he knew to be  
Cast by the tears on his own eyelashes,  
Gathering softly and heavily.

Then as again his eyes were dimmed by tears  
And with the falling echo of old fears

His heart was filled, he bowed his head and  
felt

Her sudden soothing hand upon his hair;  
And moved by a strange reverence he knelt,  
Hiding his hot face in her hollow palms,  
And laid upon her lap his vague despair,  
Till as a mild wind risen at evening calms  
The last black vapours from a tumbled sky,  
Her touch serenely rolled away his care  
And shed on him her own tranquillity.

A timeless moment thus he stayed and drew  
Peace from her hands and from her face  
unseen

And in that posture greater quiet knew  
Than ever yet his heart had found between  
The grinding wheels of wakefulness and  
sleep

Which day or night are full of restless sound,  
Laments of giants bound  
Or lost birds crying on the lightless deep.  
A moment—then the darkness of her hand

Grew thicker round his eyes and held no more  
The warm reflected sunshine of that land . . .  
Deeper and colder . . . and a shudder tore  
His waking body and a thin noise sighed  
Through a new darkness dense and terrible  
That blackened round him. ' Stay, stay,  
    stay! ' he cried,  
Like the harsh notes of a storm-shaken bell.  
But thicker all about the shadow fell,  
Till with a pang he opened heavy eyes  
On the beginning of a pale sunrise,  
That flickered chilly on the lamp and bed.  
Outside his window the sad aspen shook,  
Murmuring loudly, and its tapered head  
The poplar sighing bowed. An early rook  
In the stiff elm rehearsed the grating cry  
Which all the others answered back again.  
Burdened by life and by a memory,  
He rose to join the usual world of men.

## THE GLADE

WE may raise our voices even in this still  
glade:

Though the colours and shadows and  
sounds so fleeting seem,  
We shall not dispel them. They are not  
made  
Frailly by earth or hands, but immortal in  
our dream.

We may touch the faint violets with the hands  
of thought

Or lay the pale core of the wild arum bare;  
And for ever in our minds the white wild  
cherry is caught,  
Cloudy against the sky and melting into  
air.

This which we have seen is eternally ours,  
No others shall tread in the glade which  
now we see;



Their hands shall not touch the frail tranquil  
flowers,  
Nor their hearts faint in wonder at the wild  
white tree.

## MORNING ON THE HILL

SOFTLY, softly, the long bare boughs are  
rubbed together,

A dry leaf spindles down, like a bird's light  
feather.

Still, oh still—

Silence hath laid, in her woods and on her  
hill,

The sighing wind asleep,

And thin clouds smoke over, gently creep

Across the bare furrows and rubbed grass  
and settle down,

Coiling in faint wreaths among the golden  
stones of the town.

Still, oh still! There is harm in speaking,  
Speech is too hard, speech only means waking  
Into a world of words where lovely things  
are bound by names,

Where we pursue colour and call her flowers  
or flames.

Yet speak if you will, or rather sing  
As softly, softly as the bare boughs rubbed  
together,  
Make no more sound than touch of leaf or  
feather,  
A song as vague as the mist-wreaths that  
cling  
Round the woods and the fields and the bare  
sides of the down  
And the tall ghostly gleaming houses of the  
town,  
A song that shall mix with silence, a faint  
escaping thing. . . .  
Then, then we may find in the magic of this  
hour  
Where it is thought is still, where the brain  
has no power  
And words have no meaning except their  
sound.

## SONNET

LIKE someone bolted in a lightless room,  
We search and stumble, and our flesh  
    offend  
On chairs and tables hidden in the gloom,  
    And pause, and start again, and in the end,  
Legs bruised, hands torn, and minds be-  
    wildered, sink  
Till, huddling comfortless upon the ground,  
We wait for nothing, trembling when we  
    think  
How in the darkness dark shapes hem us  
    round.  
And some a paper hold, which faintest light  
    Silted between the shutters lets them see  
Dimly, and something written, black on white,  
    To tell them where the door is and the key.  
But even those who see as much as this  
Still guess and cannot riddle what it is.

## TO THE UNKNOWN VOICE

SPEAK once again, forgotten voice!  
How, how gladly would I hear thee  
Guide my blind and mortal choice,  
Yet long months I come not near thee.  
Whither hast thou then removed,  
Or did I never hear thee ?  
Was that whispering in the mind  
Which with sense intent I divined  
Only the stir of blood in pulses aching ?  
Hast thou never to my ear  
Stooped thy sweet mouth, my spirit waking ?  
Speak now, if speak thou canst. The hot  
    blood shaking  
Temples and arteries I know,  
And in the loud confusion I shall know thee.  
Speak and I will hear,  
Heart, will and spirit all shall show thee.

Ah, no, no, no!  
In the vast echoing cave



Floored by green earth and roofed by empty  
sky  
Nothing but wind and wave  
And no reply  
Save vain reverberation of my cry.

Forgotten voice, speak, speak again,  
Clearer than winds or waves or men.  
Like a lost friend in countries far away,  
Thou hast been for so long a day:  
Yet rise again, yet speak again to me;  
I dwindle, wanting thee!

## TO THE UNKNOWN LIGHT

**I**N the sad spirit  
Where all is dark  
And fault and merit  
Are gray shapes stark,  
Each like his neighbour  
And each dim,  
And pleasure and labour  
Alike are grim,  
Shine down, O Light  
Illumine this night.

Here in the gray  
Nor motion nor breath  
Nor joy of day  
Nor sharpness of death  
Relieves the endless  
Pitiless gloom  
Where goes friendless  
Desire to her doom:

Shine down, O Light,  
Illumine this night.

I know thou livest,  
    Then shine, then shine,  
Thou that givest  
    Help divine,  
Turn on this cold  
    Thy burning eyes  
Ere starved and old  
    The dark heart dies:  
Shine down, O Light,  
Illumine this night.

## THE DANCER

BETWEEN the hither and the further  
    woods,  
On whose dark branches beats the sun in  
    vain,  
Out in the midst where the intense light  
    broods,  
There moves a livelier light, a living fire,  
With speed that seems  
That still and sleeping radiance to disdain,  
And yet no more to tire  
Than the quick shapes that haunt our happy  
    dreams.

Light-skirted, feather-footed, laughing,  
    dancing,  
Borne on a breath of swift and buoyant air,  
Turning and sidling, retiring and advancing,  
She moves like thistledown, she floats away,  
Swings and returns, lifts eyes to take the stare  
Of the delighted watchers. Rise and sway

Her skirts about her; and now she slowly  
moves,

As though an unseen choir of singing Loves  
Hovered about her thrown-back head and  
cried

Delicious praise down to her smiling pride.  
And every turn of her young body makes  
A silent changing music, fast or slow,  
Which as she pauses breaks  
And sinks upon itself in shining overthrow.  
Silence unbroken follows the silent measure,  
The enraptured group that watched her  
quietly breathes

In the arrested silence of that pause  
An air filled full with the sweet scent of  
pleasure.

Then, as a swordsman slowly sheathes  
The blade wherewith he wove a net of light,  
So she in ordinary flesh withdraws  
The coloured image, volatile and bright,  
That danced before them and enchanted them.  
Her arms fall softly to her sides,



Soft to the knee falls the skirt's airy hem,  
The taut knees bend, the waist relaxes, swift  
Down on the grass the unstrung body slides.  
She lies there huddled, hidden the flushed  
face,  
Her shoulders heaving up the filmy shift,  
One leg outstretched in spent, neglectful  
grace.

Low mutter they their praise that softly  
reaches  
The panting girl. She does not raise her  
head  
But at the music of their grateful speeches  
All her slack body comfortably glows  
And in ecstatic weariness she makes  
The sun-warmed turf a bed;  
Her limbs fall looser, the soft eyelids close,  
She sleeps. No voice her languid slumber  
breaks;  
But now the watchers, musing deep and far,  
Lift up their eyes

Towards the vague, the sapphirine calm skies,  
While, like a visionary moving star,  
Still through their thoughts her dancing  
image flies.

## SECOND PART

## ARGUMENT

*It was foretold by the oracle that Achilles, son of the sea-goddess, Thetis, and of Peleus, King of Thessaly, should have a glorious life but an early and violent death. When the Greek chieftains prepared their expedition against Troy, his mother, hoping to avert this doom, conveyed him to Scyros, where she hid him among the maidens of the island, disguised by her enchantments as one of them. It was also foretold that the Greeks should not take Troy without the help of Achilles, and Ulysses was therefore sent to find him out, which he did by means of a trick. During his concealment on the island Achilles loved Deidamia, the king's daughter, who afterwards bore him a son.*

# THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

*To H. C. Harwood.*

**H**ARDLY the first sweet day of sun and  
showers

On which with dewy lashes the world awakes  
And in the pale glass of the stretchèd sky,  
Misty with her own tears, sees blurred and dim  
Her half-forgotten youth—hardly that day  
Had stepped from troubled wave to quiet wave  
Before the maidens of the island learnt  
They had a new companion. She was tall  
And fashioned with a grave and queenly  
beauty

Wherein the darkness of a grief to come  
Shone deep but lustrous, as upon the sand  
Of shallow seas on clear and windless days  
The shadow of the boat deepens, not flaws,  
The watery light. She met them silently,  
And when they asked her name she answered,  
Stranger,



But told not who had brought her there or  
whence.

All knew a lady had been deep engaged  
Through the whole day in secret with the  
king

And with the rustic lords who counselled  
him,

But none had seen her come or go. One said  
There had been fluting in the morning wind  
And stir of waters and a breeze that ran  
Against the season's drift at touch of dawn  
And strewed in the cool air a tingling music  
Like fingers playing on a glass's rim.

One said that in her father's house at noon  
She had passed the coolest chamber where the  
light

Through the rush-woven hangings never  
came,

And staying her bare feet by the shadowed  
entry

Had seen pale radiance lying in a pool  
Upon the trodden floor, and faintly heard

Her father's voice answering another voice  
That uttered, like a wind on ruffling water,  
Delicate syllables. And in truth there was  
A presence on the island all that day  
And all that night. The simple island lords,  
Who ruled a land as peaceful as themselves,  
Careful to have the granges full of corn,  
The goat-skins plump with wine, the flocks  
and herds

Guarded and tended to a due increase,  
Showed in their eyes, like a reflected light,  
Serenity, and in their bearing peace,  
And in their speech a cadence tranquil  
Than they had used before. Another told  
How the next day she had drowsed upon  
her bed

About the dawn, poised between sleep and  
waking,

And seen or dreamt (for when full morning  
came

She knew not which) a rosy shape that drew  
Over the ripples to the sea's red verge,

Couched in a rosy shell, with dolphin-teams  
And scaly-skinned outriders on the backs  
Of great sea-horses, blowing in resonant  
conches

A deep-breath'd tune, like noise of boisterous  
waves

Which in full sunshine on a rocky coast  
Prolong their turmoil when the storm is done  
And seem in play to mock their late assault.  
While from her window these she watched,  
she heard

A crying from wild ocean rise in answer  
And saw the rosy shell fade in the dawn  
That flowered upon the sea. Or did a cloud,  
The sun's first messenger, dipped in his  
colours,

Melt in his fiery breathing as he rose?  
And was that clamour only the first wind  
That moves at dawn and from the light-  
thrilled air

Draws a faint melody? She did not know,  
For while she watched with elbows on the sill

Sleep soothed her eyes again. She woke to  
find

Sky, 'sea and light and air and nothing more,  
Save in her thoughts a half-forgotten dream.

The island Scyros floated on the sea  
And in the water shone her crags and towers,  
A second self existing in the wave,  
Mysterious and lovely, like the double  
Which, as some yet believe for comfort's sake,  
Attends each man from birth to death,  
remaining

What in a kinder world he might have been.  
But few in Scyros were the flaws and scars  
Which the transmuting mirror-sea might  
smooth,

And in that summer Thetis' blessing lay  
Especially upon her. Fishermen  
Thanked the sea-goddess for continual calm  
That lulled their storm-washed vessels near  
the rocks

And herded in their nets the plenteous fish.  
The farmers watched their fields grow day  
by day

More fruitful, and the vines under the sun  
More prosperously ripen to the vintage,  
Unvexed by creeping rot or summer tempest.  
Nor wolf nor murrain did the shepherd plague  
And on his thyme-grown hills he slept at  
night,

Close by the dew-pond's green and glimmering  
round,

While all about him slept the peaceful flock  
Like white stones under the distant, kindly  
stars.

But not alone did the tame things increase  
For man's provision. In the dells and brakes  
The vines that bear the wild tart fruit grew  
heavy

Early in summer, and along the ground  
Trailed with their load, not waving free in  
air.

And for the maidens there were many flowers,



Wild orchids rising in the broad-leafed grass  
And pale wood-lilies lighting all the hills  
And bells, as plenty as the ocean's fish,  
That seemed to run in shoals before the  
wind.

These were the island's wealth and luxury  
Wherewith gay summer filled her spreaded  
skirts.

A constant weather shed bright influence  
Upon the life of man, and day by day  
The sea-wind blew unswerving, fresh and  
mild,  
And on his airy billows bore the clouds  
That sometimes melted in a fruitful shower.  
But never was the earth with moisture soaked  
To rot the full-eared corn in ripening month,  
Nor ever were the maidens from their tasks  
In field or garden or on tawny beach,  
Or from the games that followed the light  
task,

By storms untimely or long rains withheld.  
There is in maidenhood a subtle strength  
Reserved, as if a rift in mountains tall  
Should catch the waters of a hasty spring  
And hold them peaceful in her lap of stone  
One moment, while the sky and leaning  
    flowers  
Are mirrored in the floods and make them  
    lovely,  
Before they hurry down the side again,  
To grow, and take the soilure of their course,  
Doing the work of water on the earth.  
These that the island nourished needed not  
A goddess' blessing on the year to make  
    them  
More beautiful, to round the child's thin  
    limbs,  
To ripen the lean side, and the slant breast  
Curve out in fullness. They were nature's  
    foison,  
The flower on mankind's tree, as brief as  
    fair,

The foam-wreath on the restless tide of life,  
Whose bubbles rise and break and rise again,  
As fugitive and as eternal they.

And who beheld them, youth or graybeard  
worn

Or child or nursing-mother, felt in them  
The magic moment when the race of man  
Poises in gathered strength before fulfilment  
And turns to beauty. Not least lovely there,  
The Stranger, tall of limb and bright of eye  
And proud of carriage, joined them in their  
tasks,

Willing, and meek in answer when she earned  
Reproaches of the quicker-handed girls,  
And friendly in her looks, though on her  
brow

Cloudlike a constant sadness weighed, as if  
Knowledge mixed there with wonder. In  
their games

She was the better player. When they ran  
With skirts trussed up she outran them easily,  
And she was quicker with the tossing ball.

Even their youthful leader she outstripped,  
Deidamia, daughter of the king,  
Their fellow, though the daughter of the king,  
And only by her beauty and her wit  
The chief among them, who, till this the first  
In race and game, was by the Stranger's mien  
Of gentleness and friendliness so pleased  
That earliest among them sprang her joy  
To greet the new companion and to guide  
Her steps unpractised in their well-known  
paths.

But after they had played one hour away  
Suddenly fear possessed them, and they  
shrank

From touching her or being touched by her,  
Compelled by what strange chastity they  
knew not,

So that a soberness upon them fell  
And hushed their laughter, and their lifted  
arms

Bound to their sides and darkened their bright  
eyes.

It was as though a wandering god had plunged  
Deep fathoms from his castle in the sky  
Into earth's thicker air and flying slow  
Had paused on shining-feathered vans to  
watch

So lovely a gathered garland of mortal flowers,  
Which—as the shadow of the hawk afield  
Frightens the birds to silence—so these maids  
Stilled in their merriment and turned to marble.  
The game was stayed. The lightly bouncing  
ball

Bounced into rest upon the sunny ground  
And lay there motionless. The ring of girls  
Stared each at other, dumbly asking whence  
The influence came that thus affrighted them;  
And none gave answer. Only in mockery  
Echo among the hills drew slowly away,  
Breathing soft repetitions of the laughter  
That long had ceased. A heavy silence lay  
Upon the plat. of grass that late with sound  
Bubbled and overflowed. Then one by one,  
Each loosed her still and rigid attitude;

One bent her waist, and one the attentive  
head

Lowered, and one the stiffly pointing arm  
Let flex again. But still the silence brooded  
Over them all, as though they had been in  
truth

But rooted flowers, which have no other voice  
Save what the winds and ever-voyaging bees  
Create among their leaves. Thus from the  
depths

Of sense unconscious rose an airy thought  
To warn them of a peril not yet seen  
And nameless. But the Stranger gazed  
around

The troubled faces, hers grown darker still,  
And raised her arms, as if imploring pity,  
And slowly let them fall again. She saw,  
One after one, the shadowed glances turn  
And rest on her in mute distrust. Then she  
Breathed deep a sigh of melody forlorn,  
As sigh the woods when over darkening hills  
Come the first streamers of a storm foreknown,



And to the nearest, grown within that hour  
Her friend, who but that moment played  
with her

And with her made one moving form of grace,  
Addressed her sole appeal, silent and wan,  
Already hopeless. Deidamia gazed  
Down on the grass with veiled, unanswering  
look,

As though the life and friendliness that played  
But lately on her lips and in her eyes  
Like a wild wood-thing to some secret hole  
At sound of footsteps in the wood were gone.  
Not to the rest the Stranger raised her eyes  
But staring downward hid the unusual tears  
And with a strangled gesture of her hands  
Turned quick away. They saw her form  
recede

Among the olives, up the terraced hill,  
The white skirt fluttering from step to step,  
Climbing the zigzag path. Then, all con-  
fused,

Again they essayed the interrupted game,

Took up the idle ball and listlessly  
Threw it from hand to hand. But as they  
    played  
The unknown influence that frightened them  
Surged newly bodied from the troubled depths  
Of maiden sense and trammelled their quick  
    wrists  
And hooded their clear eyes and in their  
    thoughts  
Dazzled like summer lightning faint and soft  
That ripens the green corn on starry nights.

Meanwhile on furthest mountain out of sight  
The young Achilles, stripped of maiden's  
    dress,  
Ran like a flame. Ant, spider, lizard, snake  
Paused in their busyness among the rocks  
To see him go. Along the narrow path,  
Seldom by any trodden, overgrown  
With spiky bramble and the stinging nettle  
And binding trails of many a creeping flower,

He leapt unheeding and his naked limbs  
Were coursed by rivulets of sweat and blood.  
His teeth firm clenched, his nostrils open  
wide,

His eyes delighted by the wind he made,  
He ran and ran untiring. Far below  
The tiny people shrank to insect mould,  
The sheltered harbour dwindled to a toy,  
And soon the highest terraces of vines  
Were left behind, and among burning crags  
As naked as himself in joy he ran,  
Till on the topmost rock where the last pine,  
Scorched by the summer, by the winter gales  
At every gust unsettled, grimly clings  
To bare and dismal life, he paused and fell  
Headlong upon the stone and felt its rough-  
ness

Pleasantly hot against his heated flesh.  
Then he knew nothing but content. His blood,  
That swept in race through every stretching  
vein,  
Drowned the wild murmur of the lonely heart

With thunderous echoes in his bursting ears,  
And the tired muscles of his youthful limbs  
Ached keener as he lay than did the thoughts  
That late perplexed his spirit. Soon, too  
soon,

The gasping breath grew calmer and the blood  
Ran not so hastily. Thus on a night,  
When loud gales shake the mountains and  
their shouts

Ring on in tumult through the echoing arches  
Of bursting heaven, no voice but theirs is  
heard;

But when they cease, when gradually the  
sky

Appeases her tempestuous children, then  
Out of the spreading silence comes a voice  
To take possession of the empty air,  
The still complaining brook, from shelf to  
shelf

Falling in thin-toned misery which seems  
To fill the listening world as not the storm.  
Achilles wept. The sudden smarting tears

That sprang into his eyes astonished him;  
And there, alone or watched by humble things  
In whose pure spirits reason was not quick  
To mock at grief, he let them fall unstopped  
And eased his suffering. But when he looked  
Down through the mist of olive-leaves and  
boughs

That clothed the mountain-side, the sea shone  
soft,

A smoky blue, whereon the sun's light glinted  
And waves broke idly round a pointed reef.  
Then on his knees he raised himself and  
stretched

Strong arms to the kind ocean, crying aloud,  
' Mother, arise! Sweet mother, from the sea,  
Where with thy flowers the swell is garlanded,  
Arise and comfort me! Why was I born  
To suffer thus in exile? Must I dwell  
Far from my home among a foreign race  
And exiled from myself in these false robes,  
Kept from the emulations of my youth,  
Its triumphs, sports and dangers, like a girl?

Truly the oracle has injured me,  
Not only now in seeing my young death,  
But first when it ordained that Peleus' son  
Should have immortal substance in his flesh:  
For who but one that hath unearthly power  
Could make that possible which should not be  
Or deceive any by so gross a trick?  
Who but a goddess, moved by immortal  
wishes,  
Could so mistake the human blood that  
runs  
About my body, and my mortal wish  
Thus by divine unpitying logic thwart?'  
Thus, thus he cried; and still no answer  
came,  
And still his bosom rose rebelliously,  
And still with angry glances gazed he out  
Upon his mother's barren, lovely realm,  
His mouth awry, his cheeks, 'twixt rage and  
yearning,  
Fiery or wet. At last behind his back  
The sun dipped underneath a neighbour peak



And suddenly the air was still and cool.  
Below him far, a bird on bough unseen  
Raised a night anthem in sweet jets of sound,  
And further still, beyond the edge of foam,  
A little boat, as little as a leaf,  
Rocked on the falling swell, and from the  
bow

A kneeling fisherman dipped in the wave  
His knotted line and watched, with back  
intent,

While his companion with slow-moving oar  
Kept equal head against the gentle tide.

Thereafter, mild and grave and unaroused,  
In female robes again the Stranger went  
Among the maidens with averted head  
And did her tasks with them but not resumed  
The sweet companionship of race and game.  
And long long day added to long long day  
In summer's fragrant count. But all that  
year

The young in Scyros, like the trodden grass,  
Which, when the heel is lifted, lifts again  
A green untamèd head towards the sun,  
Seeing thus by plenty life's oppressive heel  
Raised for a season, raised themselves in joy  
And stretched out greedy hands to pick the  
flower

That might not blow again. But so it was  
That when the pot of pleasure came to boil  
Youth turned to maid and with persuasive  
lips

Demanded what she gave not. She, aloof,  
Passed by his prayer as though she heard it  
not,

And held in thought another, dimmer goal  
Than such embraces as in earlier day  
Herself and him begot. For each to each,  
Working in pairs or resting through noon's  
heat

Or waking double-bedded on airless nights,  
The maidens owned, stumbling and wanting  
words,

How each was haunted by a misty shade,  
Real but featureless. And, this confessed,  
Each from her sister turned, repenting it,  
To hide the blush that showed but chastity  
And yet seemed full of shame. And each alone  
Considered what her sister said, and dreamed  
That better she could see, although not say,  
The vision far removed. But in their dances  
Ringed on the green and in their skipping  
games

A spirit ghosted them as not before  
And turned them from the joys of human  
maids

To bodiless imaginings. They grew  
All through that summer like a race apart,  
Yet not the less fulfilled of grace and joy  
Which unknown longing lit to deeper hue,  
Like lightning playing in a distant cloud  
Whose edges still are bright with sunset's  
rose.

No more by garden, hill or lonely shore  
Deidamia led a romping train

To do their daily tasks or play or swim;  
No more on island feast and holiday  
She loosed them laughing in the happy crowd  
To find new partners who their supple forms  
In game or dance with rougher grip might  
hold

Yet not in arms less loving. When the ship  
Out of the uncharmed world beyond the rim  
Of visible ocean glided smoothly in,  
Unlooked for but most welcome, and the  
people

Came down rejoicing to the waterside  
And ringed about the unknown voyagers,  
The maids, withdrawn behind the shouting  
folk,

Like clouds indeed, ranked in the upper  
sky,

That in their bosoms hold the needed rain,  
Aloof and lovely, wandered out of reach,  
And like a summer cloud their shadow  
threw,

Cool but not dark upon the lively earth.

But soon to them, mustered beyond the  
throng,  
Half hidden in the melting airs of day  
That deepened towards night on land and  
sea,  
There came a voice, a strange appealing voice,  
That moved them inwardly they knew not  
how,  
And with the rustle and sheen of spreaded  
stuffs  
Thrown on the grass, and many a gem displayed,  
Drew them to sidle through the crowd and  
view  
The vessel's cargo. Long and long they  
gazed,  
Charmed by the tongue that wove an airy web  
About their spirits; and the Stranger too,  
Drawn in among them, gazed with empty  
eyes  
On robes and scarves, till on the growing pile  
With careless hand and half-averted look

The merchant threw a sword. An ancient  
sword

Sank in a bed of softly yielding silks  
And lay there darkly gleaming. On the  
blade

Old grooves left keen and sharp the shearing  
edge:

The hilt, by many a hand-grip worn and smooth,  
Spoke the embrace of battling fingers clenched  
Often in noble rage or the desperate  
Frenzy of beaten men who dreaded death  
Or the cold iron will of slayers set

Upon their fellows' end. These, like a  
swarm

Of ghosts that from the enchanter's eery glass  
The unwary words call forth, rose from the  
blade

And steamed into the Stranger's smarting  
eyes,

So that her own stretched hand she could not  
see

Which the hilt drew towards it. But her flesh



Felt that compulsion in the tendons fine  
And in her veins again the blood at war,  
Desire with resolution, vow with wish,  
Storming between the unused banks. And

then,

Unwilling and regretted, the gesture made  
Its own completion and an act was born,  
Not ever from the world to be effaced  
With all its consequence of deed and thought.  
The hand that quickly from the hilt recoiled  
Could never be the same again, the nerves  
That henceforth should its fearful power  
direct

Were in their deep mysterious root transformed.

Nothing she cared who watched. Herself  
she saw

In her own spirit something rise and bud,  
Suddenly swelling, and the sheath of dreams  
Break into curling up and withered leaves  
To let that strange flower of the future through,  
A blossom which with petals sombrely red

Presaged wild deeds, fruition of desire,  
And after fruiting done a something else  
Dark to foresee but heavy with a sense  
Of weariness and blame and shame and tears.  
This gloomed in her wide eyes and hid the  
scene,

Hid her companions, unawakened still,  
Busy in dream with toy and ornament,  
And hid the sideways glance that fixed on her  
In triumph. Hardly, when that voice began  
Low in her ear, like mutter of a stream  
Heard by the night-bewildered wanderer  
Deep in a misty wood, who knows the marsh  
Deadly to straying feet—hardly she knew  
Whence that doom-heavy soft persuasion  
came,

From lips without or the unsuspected thought  
New-wakened in her heart with serpent-  
tongue,  
Calling the virgin spirit out of childhood  
To life and death and more than life or  
death.

Dumbly she listened, but as one who looks,  
Not listens, with taut sense and straining  
eyes,

Then with a muttered word, 'To-morrow!'  
turned

Towards the mountain, where the tumbled  
crag

And huge still woods seemed in the darkening  
air

To spread their darker selves and stain the sky  
With deeper hue about them. As she turned,  
She saw with outward sight, that nothing sees,  
Another glance beseeching her. It passed  
As fades the bird's quick shadow on the field  
When a cloud overtakes it. Through the  
people

With stumbling feet and distant gaze she  
went.

This day was summer's harshest on the isle:  
Her breath lay heavy in the stubble field

And field unreaped where stood the toppling  
ears

And every vineyard where the clusters gloomed,  
Full-globèd shadows in the still-hung leaves;  
And every stone upon the shore rayed back  
Dull months-collected heat in stirless air  
Among the maidens. They about the show  
Still packed with swelling whispers and quick  
hands,

And felt slow moisture down their bodies  
run,

Stand on their foreheads and make lank their  
curls,

Till one raised up her eyes, and on her cheek  
A faint breath smote with cold, awakening  
touch.

Low her voice sounded in the hubbub soft  
And yet so deep that each her whispering  
ceased

And looked, and saw upon the sea's far  
edge

The sunset like a wavering curtain hung

To hide the unknown. Soft rose, smoky and  
soft,  
Spread out across the sky a melting scroll  
And underneath, a cloud, loose-edged and  
dim,  
Rode on the water. Thence the wind blew  
chill,  
Fingered their faces, pushed their tresses back  
And laid the airy garments cold and close  
Against their shivering and reluctant flesh.  
Away from them, alone, the Stranger paused  
High on the shoulder of the stony hill,  
And looking eastward as they west, beheld  
At vision's limit, poised in crystal air,  
The phantom of a mountain-range, whose  
base  
Sprang out of vapour, but whose floating  
peaks  
Threw back in broken gold the sun's last  
light.  
Dazzled she stood and stared. The moun-  
tains swam

Like rainbowed ice afloat on Arctic seas,  
Inpalpable, but sharp of edge and colour,  
One moment, and the next dissolved in  
    shade,  
Gone like a glowing cloud that winds dis-  
    perse;  
And darkness from that first drowned point  
    came on,  
Hurrying on to cover all the world.

Again Achilles laid upon the rock  
His maiden garments, now with sad contempt  
Yet something new of sorrow in the touch  
That needlessly made smooth their tumbled  
    folds.

Then, like the rising of the winter sun,  
Burning but sullen-hued, out of pale clouds,  
The hero's body rose, from that eclipse  
For ever freed. Now up the deep ravines  
That clove the mountain, and the hollow  
    paths



That scaled her flanks, flowed darkness like a  
tide

And the long grass streamed out invisibly  
Like seaweed under the slow-swelling wave.  
Far from the fitful lights and voices loud  
Achilles came with heavy, lagging step  
Up the ascent. His feet the pollen brushed  
From pale, night-waking flowers and mur-  
mured on

Through weeds by summer's heat made harsh  
and dry,

As though earth's spirit in the stillness  
breathed

A nervous deep unrest. Heavy he trod  
And paused at every turning of the path  
And took the next step upward with a sigh.  
And often as he went he looked behind  
As though in quivering bough and air-tossed  
leaf

Were whispers of an unknown follower.  
But closer still thought's dark pursuers came,  
Spirits new waking and agog to form

Themselves strong bodies from the smoking  
blood

His hand was now to spill, and from his own  
That after must be spilt. At last he stayed  
Under an olive-tree and sinking down  
Bowed his hot forehead into cramped hands,  
Feeling a little world whose pulses beat  
Like earthquakes or annihilating wars.  
About his seat the creatures of the night  
Sought each a weaker, and the ancient rocks  
Saw many a scene of tiny battle and death.  
After an hour was gone he raised his head,  
Hearing, he thought, once more below the  
crag

The quiet water washing on a reef  
Which in the silence grew, until it seemed,  
Close in his ear, but in no human tongue,  
A gentle voice speaking strange words of  
peace.

'Mother,' he cried, 'it is your voice. O use  
The speech I know!' No answer came to  
him:

But when the echoes of his cry had fallen  
Like stricken birds from dark crag to dark  
sea,

He spoke again: ' Mother, was it from this  
You hid me, not my own longings, my own  
dreams ?

These were the deeds I dreamt of—to make  
cause

With the shrill cuckold for the magic harlot  
And slay innocent men! Now I can see  
What it is that must die before my death,  
Eaten at the root before the arrow strikes.

I cry to you as not before, for then

I accused the kind, unknowing deity

That saw the motions of my human heart

As I have watched the toad's dull pulsing  
throat

In ignorance and love. Now I implore

Your strength against the thing you feared  
for me!

For this dark fate that points out the forked  
way

- Loves not nor hates, but knows, and in my  
brain

Has sown a dreadful guessing. Shall I become  
An airy bubble, empty, round and gay,  
That leaves not even a stain upon the earth,  
Or the gross meat which day by day my  
fellows

Pass through dishonouring stomachs for their  
food ?

How should I choose between them if I must ?  
Yet as I speak my choice is made.' The sea,  
Moaning about the eternal base below,  
Spread through the air a voice of sad assent  
That gripped his heart and in the grip gave  
peace,

The peace of things resolved, not to be changed.

Deep grew the darkness where he stood.

The moon,

Arising softly from a couch of cloud,  
Lightened the hillside here and there, and cast

On every shadowed place a thicker shade.  
Within that veil Achilles stood obscured,  
Numb at the heart, but all Achilles now,  
For now from him a last enchantment fell,  
Leaving him strong and sad. Out of the  
world

Faded at last the semblance he had borne,  
Vanished as vanishes a happy dream  
Which at the menace of inbreaking day  
Still shields the sleeper from the cruel sun.  
Gone was the Stranger. Whither? Ask as  
well

Where the flower's beauty goes when petals  
fade

And the rough seed thrusts out. Yet it may be  
That still a spirit haunts the isle, a ghost  
Of dew and light and air, revisiting  
The beach where long ago the maidens played,  
And finds perhaps in some far, narrow vale  
The rude grave of a poet, dead too young,  
Whom death, or life, frustrated of his hope,  
Presses her faint lips to the soil and breathes

One word of half-remembered sisterhood.  
But these are dreams. Out of the breathing  
world

Long, long ago that semblance fled away,  
Past any summons, even of the sweetest mouth  
To which it once had answered. Now in  
vain

Those patient feet climbed the rough path,  
in vain

Deidamia through the olive-trees,  
A slip of white that dimly drifted on  
Like sunshine pale in sea-abysms drowned,  
Searched groping and astray. In vain she  
called,

Bidding the lost companion answer her—  
Too late the summons spoken to a wraith.  
Yet a receding whisper trembled out  
As though the air had spoken or the leaves  
Had lent a voice to the unbodied spirit  
To breathe an inarticulate farewell.  
Gladly she answered and again came on  
And by the darkness where the hero stood,



Only a shadow paler than the rest,  
Troubled that shadow with her gentle plea:  
'Why do you shun us, Stranger? Have we  
not

Long since repented, though in looks not  
words,

The wrong we did you? We were cruel and  
strange,

Knowing not why, not knowing we were so,  
But moved by something hidden in ourselves  
That never stirred before. It was not un-  
kindness

Turned me from you and soured my friendly  
heart

But kindness too sudden in my breast. O say,  
What serpent raised its head 'twixt you and me  
And stung the hands held out in growing love?'  
She paused, and in her voice the tears welled high  
Like an encroaching wave that fails again  
Before the brink. 'Why are you strange  
to us?

What wakes in us a thing so long unknown

To sudden aching life? Before you came  
We lived together, maidens without thought,  
As though the rolling world its axle stayed  
And time forebore to trouble us. But now  
The emblems of our dream grow real and  
harsh,

Our peace becomes a smarting restlessness.

Return to us, return, and we with games  
And gentle love will woo you to ourselves  
And all shall be with us as once it was.  
Will you not come with me? Can you not  
give

Again what I at first refused?' He stood  
As rigid as a cypress-tree at noon  
When all the mountain sleeps and on her  
side

The woods are breathless. Then with painful  
cry

At one step from the thicket he advanced  
And in the moonlight tall and naked appeared,  
Saying with harsh, loud voice, 'I am Achilles!'

Whereat the girl moaned low, shrinking  
aside,

And all life's terror flickered in her gaze.

He bent his straining body down to her,

She winced away still more on powerless  
knees,

And thus they stayed unmoving. The night  
stilled

Her wandering airs and every jiggling leaf

Hung quiet on the stalk. Nothing was heard,

Save from the girl a deep and labouring breath

That broke into a sob and died away

And left a quivering horror in the darkness

When silence rose about the frozen pair.

Until at last Achilles spoke again,

Like thunder speaking on the cloudy hill

To dwellers in the valley far below,

Distant, deliberate and dreadful. 'You

Shrink now from truth as once from lies. I  
have looked

Truth in the face and seen a fearful thing,

Not what we think—yet I am not afraid.'

He ceased. Again the echo died. The girl  
Raised her sunk face with wrung and question-  
ing look,

As though upon his breast was written a  
word,

Where the hard answer to all questions lay,  
Which she spelt slowly out. Upon her  
brow

The weight of unexpected knowledge grew,  
As harsh a weight to carry as may be  
In mortal womb the progeny of a god.

Yet never did the proud and stem-straight  
neck

Sway at the burden; and in those wide eyes  
Horror gave way to wonder, wonder drew in  
A sharp and dolorous ecstasy. At last

He, bending down, another answer read  
To his own cry. There was in their embrace  
No kindness nor no pleasure, but the strength  
Of floods unloosened, as their spirits rose  
Dizzy and blind through the void fields of  
night.

O stars, shine kindly on them, and, dark  
earth,

Breathe all your thick and friendly odours up  
About their bed, the smell of well-dunged  
fields

Ready to bear new harvests and the smell  
Of cattle stalled in comfortable byres,  
Mixed with the keener scents of transient  
flowers,

That drift, a natural incense, on the hills;  
And you, dim forest on the mountain side,  
Receive among the noises of the night  
That cry of bodily pain and let it fall  
Into the silence with the fox's bark  
And scarce-heard whimper of the netted  
hare.

When the slow morning came, the crawling  
sun

Appeared behind a heavy bank of cloud  
And threw a gray and level flood of light

Towards the island; and the hero's arm  
Threw a distincter shadow on the breast  
That panted soft beneath it into peace.  
He raised himself a little, and with voice  
That dawn's mysterious hush made thin and  
still

Murmured, 'The night is over, I must go!'  
Then with convulsive grasp of his strong  
arms

He raised her to him, and his anxious mouth  
Sought on her quiet lips, cold cheeks, dark  
lids,

A further tenderness night had not shown.  
He found not what he sought, or, if he found,  
Found also in that sweet such bitter taste  
As checked the crowding kisses. Through  
his tears

That ached unshed he saw her resting body  
Blurred with unsteady light. He closed his  
eyes

And in his heart wild lamentation rose,  
A jarred and dissonant music that bewailed



Their two defeated lives. O for the world  
Of dreams and unawaked enchantment still!  
Already on her smooth brow and lineless  
cheeks,

Forewritten in a ghostly character,  
Age, sorrow and deception and the shame  
Of hopes forsaken grinned at him. He knew,  
His loth flesh crawling at the touch, that now  
The hateful pencil wrote upon his skin  
Its mocking message—not the same, for age  
Had no part in it. This was truth indeed,  
Which he had seen, he boasted, without fear,  
But dim and veiled, not in particular shape.  
He winced unbearably, his spirit felt,  
Grinding and harsh, the stirring of that truth,  
Too like the pangs of motherhood which soon  
Deidamia's body must convulse,  
Being to her then, deserted and alone,  
The sole remembrance of this night, their  
love.

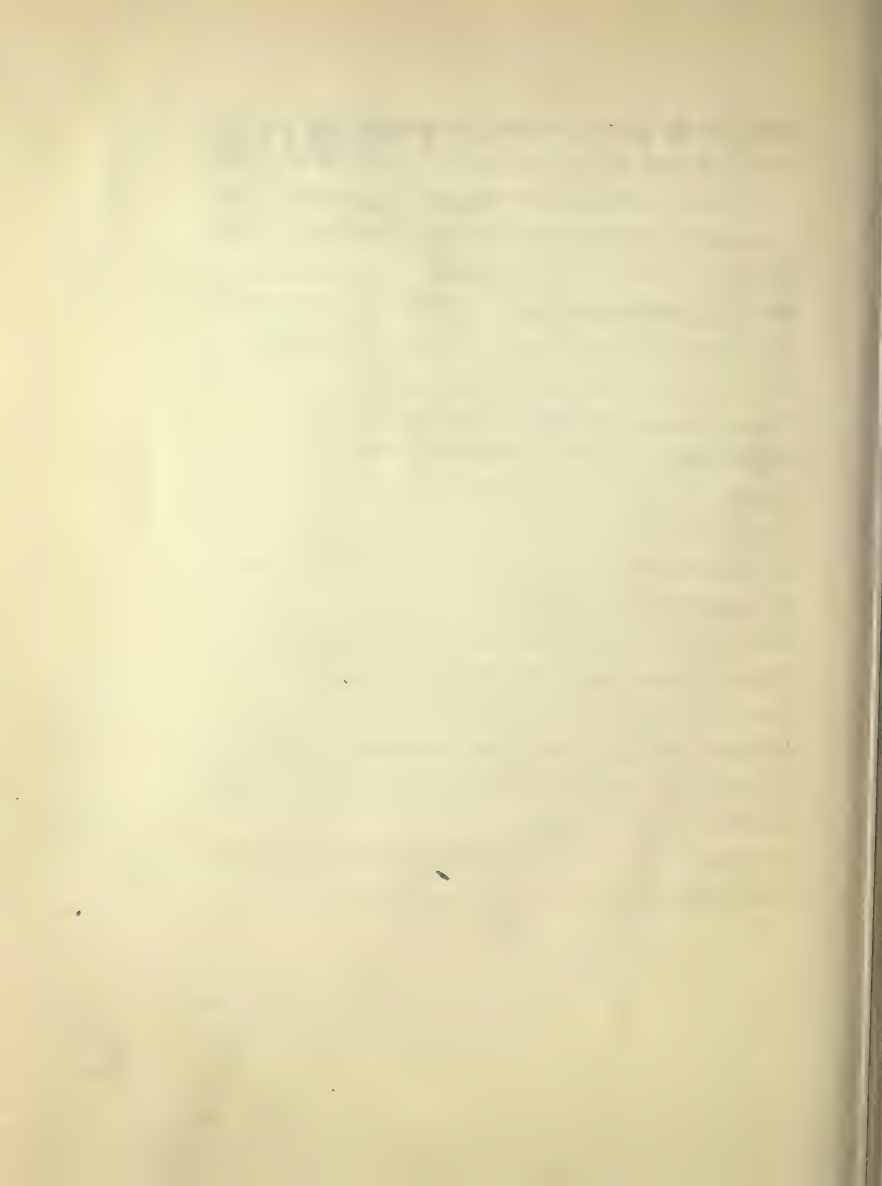
He groaned, but at the sound she raised, her  
eyes,

Answering him only with a long, slow look  
Deep in his own, which gazed at her and shed  
Their burning hunger and unrest, until  
They mirrored pure the mournful peace of  
hers,  
The peace of things fulfilled, deep beyond  
joy.

*May Day, Portofino*

—*Christmas Day, Lewes, 1920.*

## THIRD PART



## THE SKY AT CAMPDEN

*To Eleanor and Alec Miller.*

FOLD after fold, the smoky clouds come over  
The western edge,  
Sag, lift and sink and at last discover  
A long thin strip of delicate blue sky.  
Sharp drawn against it, the thin hedge  
Upon the hill-top and the high  
Unstirring groves of trees  
First catch the sun as the clouds go over,  
Sailing eastward to uncover  
The airy width of blue.  
And all the fields above and here all these  
Shine green and golden, slowly fade  
And in the shadow lose their burning hue,  
Where grass and leaf and corn one hue are made,  
And faintly, gradually glow again  
As the sun takes them  
Or shudder, veiled in the darkly gleaming rain,  
Or ripple over as the wind shakes them,

Turning a new face to the skeltering air,  
Lovely in light or rain or shade,  
In any weather inalterably fair.

Here the sky hangs so closely overhead,  
From Dover's Hill to Blockley, a canopy  
spread  
Roofing the valley with a changing light,  
Where, underneath, long roads, winding and  
white,  
Toil up the hill-sides to approach the sky,  
Where the small town and all its villages lie,  
Ruled and completed by the blue above.  
And here the clouds that elsewhere distantly  
move,  
Aloof, remote from human care or love,  
Share in our daily life, no further away  
Than the old elms or the warm ricks of hay,  
And the sky is scarce stranger than the grass  
we tread,  
And the rain falls softlier, kindlier here  
Than in other places out of the austere



Hard heavens, wherefrom the traveller bends  
his head.

Other skies are strange. We have been  
where

Earth's friendliness grew thin in the cold air  
And the small houses clung to the hill-side  
And the restless wind in gaunt trees muttered  
and cried

As it fled on. Not so this charmed air  
That softly steals by thicket and grove  
With the low voice and the tender hands of love,  
Or races laughing across the fields and throws  
Stones and soft grass and flowers lightly  
down

Where, like the bared heart of a dying rose,  
In all its golden beauty glows the town.

And sometimes in the evening all's dove-pale,  
When the day-weary breezes fail  
And halt to make the valley a fold  
For their far-driven flocks of cloud. We see  
The cloudy edges of the lifted wold

Melt in the gray and fade in mystery.  
Once rising early we beheld  
Against dawn's pure and quiet western sky,  
Poised in the airless branches of the tree,  
A glowing apple night's thick dews had  
    swelled  
To sudden ripeness, the first, no neighbour  
    by.  
And once a burning haystack in the dusk  
Lit up the valley, and all the people came  
From the deeper night around, from the sombre  
    husk  
That burst to show this crimson fruit of flame;  
And the tall fire rose into the sky and cast  
Reflections and pale twilights far away,  
And on the passing clouds a mimic day  
That faded as they passed.

Draw back the curtain, throw the window  
    wide!  
Midnight. Round love's own dwelling, where  
    we dwell,

Silently, softly those great presences glide,  
Nothing their track to tell,  
Save where the staring, pin-point stars go  
out;  
Still overhead they slide  
In slow benignant folding us about.  
Love, draw the curtain again and we will  
sleep:  
Let the friendly sky and the clouds our vigil  
keep.

## BOATS AT NIGHT

**H**OW lovely is the sound of oars at night  
And unknown voices, borne through  
windless air,

From shadowy vessels floating out of sight  
Beyond the harbour lantern's broken glare  
To those piled rocks that make on the dark  
wave

Only a darker stain. The splashing oars  
Slide softly on as in an echoing cave

And with the whisper of the unseen shores  
Mingle their music, till the bell of night

Murmurs reverberations low and deep  
That droop towards the land in swooning  
flight

Like whispers from the lazy lips of sleep.  
The oars grow faint. Below the cloud-dim  
hill

The shadows fade and now the bay is still

## THE HARBOUR

**I**NTO your heart as into harbour home,  
A flagging ship with furling sails, I come.  
There round the haven stand immortal trees,  
Rank upon rank, in sun-steeped terraces,  
And in the water, still and blue and deep,  
Their images and the ship's in quietness sleep;  
And there the air is calm, is pure and bright,  
Sweet to the nostrils, full of slumbering light,  
So crystal-clear that all the shadows stand,  
Sharp-edged, distinct, alike on sea and land.  
There peacefully at anchor the ship lies,  
Dreaming and still, where only change the  
    skies  
From noon's pale glow to night's profounder  
    blue,  
And radiance reigns the day and night-time  
    through,  
Whether the sun's light, or the moon's, or  
    star's,  
Falls on the deck and on the quiet spars.

No trouble comes those meeting capes between  
Where rise the loaded vines in bounty green,  
No angry water washes on the quays,  
No querulous high moaning of the seas  
Distracts the ear there, but a rich and still  
Whisper drifts seaward from the tranquil hill,  
Where in the long ravines of grassy land  
The orchards heavy with their burden stand;  
And in those sheltered folds the branches bear  
Bright cherry, glowing apricot, gold pear,  
Quinces and medlars and dark mulberries,  
Year after year in generous increase;  
And on the ground beneath, where apples  
    fall,  
The tangled vines of great-globed melons  
    crawl.

Here is my rest and here at last I come  
To lie upon your bosom and be dumb,  
Where the clouds gather not, where no wind  
    moves,  
And the light that fills the quiet air is love's.



## SONNET

THE dying man, whom all give up for dead,  
Sees how his world a little circle grows,  
The fire's warmth falling on the quiet bed,  
The sunlight on the wall—sees not, but  
knows  
How at his window the trees bud and leaf  
And clouds march in procession through  
the sky,  
Knows, but sees none of these, and his belief  
Fails, and he chides his brain for fantasy.  
But should he rise at length, should he awake  
From that dark sleep and visit once again,  
Feeble and slow as a new-sloughing snake,  
What were before but hill and sky and  
plain,  
He finds and hails, at each revealing turn,  
Gold plains and skies like gems and hills that  
burn.

## THE NIGHTJARS

ALL day the cuckoo has sung his double  
cries,

Far in the woods and hidden, or close but  
not seen:

Once he flew overhead and we heard the sound  
rise

In the song's space and die in a thicket  
green.

All day the blackbird has sung with the thrush  
And the nightingale, though we heard him  
not clear,

And others chirped and murmured from bush  
to bush,

Loud, soft, shrill, uncertain, far and near.

Now on the dark hill, after that tumult of song,  
Silence settles down, a step before night,  
While on the ground and in the trees and all  
along

The widespread horizon slowly dies the  
light,

Like a rainbowed fish held dying in the net,  
With last lovely flushes to the final gray;  
And over the black hill a soft wind blows yet,  
Carrying on wide wings the last light away.

How immense the silence! So a fountain falls,  
When the jet fails, with a last scattered  
spray,  
And the wind goes on, as the settling thrush  
calls,  
Carrying on soft wings the last echoes away.

Step by step, slowly, we climb the silent hill,  
Speechless, almost frightened. As the  
path wheels round  
Into an open glade where the grass is hushed  
and still,  
Warmth rises sudden and startling from the  
ground.

The trees merge and melt in the fading gray  
sky,  
And now from tree or bush, we cannot tell  
where,  
A thin sound arises, faintly, haltingly,  
Stops to take breath and then fills the quiet  
air

With a hoarse, sweet music. Thereon, all  
around,  
All the other nightjars join in the whirring  
song,  
And, as we pause to hear, the shadowy trees  
resound  
Till the whole vague hill-side is filled with  
the throng,

Singing louder and louder. But all at once  
The chorus gives way to the sweetest voice,  
A single and lonely singer, whose unchanging  
runs  
Charm our ears with magic, monotonous  
noise.

He pauses. We seek him; but the song once  
gone,

There is nothing to show him. We clap  
hands in vain.

Now over the crest a new faint song is begun,  
That we can hardly hear. Is it he again?

And as we halt, doubtful, in the darkness  
growing

Thicker and stranger round us, full of  
mysteries,

With the first night airs upon our faces blowing,  
A dark shape flaps out from the invisible  
trees,

And slides across our path, a moving clot of  
night,

His wings knocking loudly as he flies along,  
Startling the stillness. And he fades out of  
our sight

And in his shadowy thicket resumes the song.

## DOVER'S HILL

*To F. L. Griggs.*

FROM this hill where the air's so clear  
    We can see away and away,  
And the villages, far as near,  
    Shine in the lucid day.  
On rough short grass we tread  
    And thistles bend at our feet  
And a lark sings overhead  
    And the clouds are white and fleet.  
The wind is strong in our faces,  
    It drives us, we veer and yield,  
And a broken thistle-top races  
    Over the tossing field;  
But below, as we look around,  
    The deep long plains appear  
Like a lost country drowned  
    In a tranquil flood of air,  
Whence now and again there rises  
    To the listener on this shore  
The muffled sound of the voices  
    Of bells that ring once more.



## THE EMIGRATION

**B**EFORE dawn, under the windless mountains, the people  
Came from their villages, assembling clan by clan,  
Through the last hours of night over black dusty roads  
Trailing reluctant feet, driving the slow waggons,  
Men, women and children in the cold dusk confounded.  
Hardly came a ray of light from the muffled sky,  
Hardly in that still dawn a sound from quiet air,  
Only the endless murmur of feet shuffling on,  
The sobbing of tired children, and a woman's tears  
Held in her bosom like a stream trickling in darkness,

And a young man's quickened breath that  
made no more  
Than a puff of white on the chill air. Night  
was long,  
That night in the valley, and all the winds  
were still.  
Slow and unseen came the first ascent of the  
road  
That led to the hidden pass and another world.  
Here first the way grew stony, here first the  
feet  
Of the weaker stumbled and were bruised,  
here the pebbles  
Slipped under aching soles and wrenched the  
careless ankle;  
And now from summits yet in darkness  
unknown,  
From snowy slopes and dizzy ice-belted peaks,  
Stole, with the louder sounding of the water-  
fall,  
A still wind hardly moving whose gentle  
breath

Crept through woollen cloaks like the trickling  
of water.

The king, their leader, daunted his stout  
stallion

And drew into a rocky cleft whence he watched  
The sad procession winding upward in silence,  
Marked every drooping shoulder that bore  
a spear

And every woman that held in cramped arms  
A child to her breast and every walking child  
That whimpered and stumbled. He saw them  
all

Though gray through the gray night they  
drooped and stumbled.

When the last had gone he turned and rode  
downwards,

Carefully, leaning back on his horse's haunches,  
And before him unseen, like messengers in  
haste,

Plunged the rattling stones dislodged by the  
hooves.

On the flat land he first saw the growing light  
That hovered on the swift stream rustling  
    beside him,  
Ice-cold, ice-gray, endlessly tossed and heaved  
In small blunt waves, as down from the glacier,  
Hung aloft still in night, it fled to the valley,  
There to grow calm, to grow smooth and  
    peaceable,  
Spreading in reedy brooks through the water-  
    meadows  
Where the tadpoles thicken the stream and  
    the dragon-flies  
Mate in late spring on their dizzy flights.  
Here the king paused as the twilight brightened.  
Light swelled as into an aching head comes sleep,  
Thus unknown, unperceived, but steadily  
    growing  
Till the near fields were distinct and the  
    nearest farm  
Plainly to be seen, with byre, barn and sheds,  
And there on the dung-heap a lazy cock  
Moving sluggish wings and lifting his head.

And the light grew. And, beyond, the land  
was revealed,  
Pastures and grain and the scattered houses  
Over which the elms spread out their broad  
branches;  
And further beyond rose the desolate hills  
Covered with stubborn bushes, bracken and  
wiry grass,  
And the poisonous green marshes that lay in  
their hollows,  
Bounding the narrow valley with an iron wall.

So, since the valley was narrow and close-  
bounded,  
A circle of fruitfulness hemmed in by the  
unfruitful,  
Since the quiet race brought forth ever more  
children,  
Sons must leave their fathers, daughters their  
mothers,  
The quiet be the unquiet and stay-at-homes  
be wanderers.

No words came to the king's lips. He gazed  
around him,  
Dumbly regarding the land where his brother  
to-day  
Ruled in his place. Far away his eyes travelled  
Seeing the first smoke rising from a farm-  
house  
Twenty feet untroubled in the motionless air.  
They are rising, he whispered, the wife has  
lighted  
Their fire and the husband pauses in the door  
To look at his cattle grazing in the meadows.  
So have we all; and when we are gone  
Still every morning the fires will be lighted,  
Men will go to the fields and bring in the  
crops.  
In the cool dark barn where my oats were  
gathered,  
Where I rested on the heap and took soft  
handfuls  
Of the smooth hard grain that ran through  
my fingers,



This year my brother will gather his oats  
And coming in tired from walking his fields,  
Dazed with summer's glare, will throw  
himself down

On the yielding heap and hear the whispering  
Of the flowing grain that trickles round his  
body

—Next year as well, and many, many years.

The light grew strong: it was now full  
morning.

He turned his horse and rode like a storm  
After the marching people. Up the steep track  
The horse's strong shoulders forced the  
ground behind him,

Plunging and pulling. The blue sky above  
Grew brighter and colder: with a rush of  
cold waters

The torrent hurled downwards in its narrow  
channel.

On the high shoulder of the wind-swept  
mountain

The track turned round and beyond the  
corner

The king in his haste found the people  
halted,

Below them the abyss—and the shelving  
path

Stretched narrow and treacherous into the  
distance.

Strung out along it, huddled and comfortless,  
They made their poor breakfast. Their  
sullen eyes

Looked only at the hard stone beneath  
their feet,

Not backwards or forwards. But a group of  
women

Clustered at the edge with gestures and sad  
cries,

And in the midst of them a silent woman  
Stared into the gulf. For she was the mother  
Of the first that died, of the child whose foot  
Had turned on a pebble, throwing him  
over,

Down, down, down, bouncing from ledge to  
ledge.

There now his body, spread-eagled on the  
rubble,

Alone, abandoned, waited vultures and wolves.

The king rode past, saying nothing. His  
grim lips

Were frozen hard by pain and love of his  
people.

His hard bleak eyes stared onward where the  
ribbon-path

Vanished in the waste of the tumbled snowy  
mountains,

Peak after peak and chasm after chasm,

Mercilessly lighted by the cold lucid sun.

## STANZAS WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

HOW then, my dark and empty spirit,  
Wouldst thou employ these brooding days?  
The senses lose their trivial merit,  
The sky grows chill, the rose decays;  
We see no more what we have seen,  
We are not now what we have been.

Thus in the middle of her season  
Sometimes the flowering may doth fade.  
Who knoweth by what inner treason  
Her rich adornment is betrayed?  
Now as the blossom from the tree  
So falls my old content from me.

I cannot tell what saps me so  
And takes enjoyment from my mind:  
I only see the bright months grow  
Duller or my weak eyes more blind.  
This year hath ousted from my breast  
Joy for a dark and vague unrest.

I read in some forgotten story  
How in the mountains of the west,  
Where the calm sea in sun-flecked glory  
Under the snow-peaks lies at rest,  
The dying eagle seeks a place  
Where a great wind drives up in space;  
And there though from his failing wings  
Motion has gone with joy and strength,  
On the ascending stream he swings  
Into the sky and sees at length  
On the warm current soaring high  
The ledge where first he learnt to fly,  
The valleys where of old he preyed,  
The eyries where he dwelt and loved,  
That eyrie where his nest was made,  
Which long the tempest hath removed—  
In his ascent he sees these things  
And needs no motion of his wings.  
And still up-borne he rises higher  
And fades from his companions' sight,

Lost in the sun's descending fire,  
Floating amid a sea of light—  
Would that we too, when pleasures fail,  
Could find at last that mighty gale!

Would that we too, no effort making,  
On such a current could aspire,  
Through the thick air and cloud-wreaths  
breaking  
Into the heights that we desire,  
There in a lonely still delight  
To float upon a sea of light!



## THE SHADOW

DEATH, would I feared not thee,  
But ever can I see  
Thy mutable shadow thrown  
Upon the walls of Life's warm, cheerful room.  
Companioned or alone,  
I feel the presence of that following gloom,  
Like one who vaguely knows  
Behind his back the shade his body throws—  
'Tis not thy shadow only, 'tis my own!

I face towards the light  
That rises fair and bright  
Over wide fields asleep,  
But still I know that stealthy darkness there  
Close at my heels doth creep,  
My ghostly company, my haunting care;  
And if the light be strong  
Before my eyes, through pleasant hours and long,  
Then, then, the shadow is most black and  
deep.

## A HOLLOW ELM

WHAT hast thou not withstood,  
    Tempest-despising tree,  
Whose bloat and riven wood  
    Gapes now so hollowly,  
What rains have beaten thee through many  
    years,  
What snows from off thy boughs have dripped  
    like tears ?

Calmly thou standest now  
    Upon thy sunny mound;  
The first spring breezes flow  
    Past with sweet dizzy sound;  
Yet on thy pollard top the branches few  
Stand stiffly out, disdain to murmur too.

The children at thy foot  
    Open new-lighted eyes  
Where on gnarled bark and root  
    The soft warm sunshine lies—

Dost thou upon thine ancient sides resent  
The touch of youth, quick and impermanent ?

These at the beck of spring  
Live in the moment still;  
Thy boughs unquivering,  
Remembering winter's chill  
And many other winters past and gone,  
Are mocked, not cheated, by the transient  
sun.

Hast thou so much withstood,  
Dumb and unmoving tree,  
That now thy hollow wood  
Stiffens disdainfully  
Against the soft spring airs and soft spring  
rain,  
Knowing too well that winter comes again ?

## CONSTANTINOPLE

I suddenly realise that the ambition of my life has been—since I was two—to go on a military expedition against Constantinople. . . . This is nonsense.—*Letters of Rupert Brooke.*

Still it waits redeeming.—*James Elroy Flecker.*

### FIRST VOICE

NO more, they say, the Host is raised in that Cathedral which was mine.

### SECOND VOICE

Like you I too beneath that dome have eat  
the bread and drunk the wine  
That's banished thence, but not like yours  
my empire shook at last and fell  
And then I died upon the walls built by  
another Constantine.

### FIRST VOICE

All's changed, they say, all's changed within  
that lovely and most sacred shell,

And where dark unbelievers pray no more  
the holy eikons shine.

SECOND VOICE

I do not know. I do not know. When I  
went out to fight that day  
My starving people filled the streets and  
cheered me thinly on my way.  
Behind me lay the Christian town, before me  
stood the infidel;  
And they were many, we were few—I know  
no more but that I fell.  
I could not see or hear or ask, my face being  
masked with blood and clay.

FIRST VOICE

Byzantium was proud and strong. When war  
and fire had struck and ceased,  
To build her lovelier than before I took the  
treasures of the east.  
A thousand cunning artists worked on floor  
and pillar, porch and dome,

In marble and in precious stones to make the  
Holy Wisdom's home;  
And there when all the toil was done I knelt  
and prayed, I bowed my head,  
Knowing that now Byzantium was royal as  
the elder Rome.

SECOND VOICE

And is the Holy Wisdom fled since that fierce  
creed rolled o'er my head ?

FIRST VOICE

The heathen prays where once we prayed,  
now that both you and I are dead.  
Poor fallen king, nine hundred years from  
me to you the city stood  
And seven centuries her walls were washed  
in vain with Moslem blood,  
An angry tide that rose to flood and boiled  
and stormed and ebbd again,  
Where like a torrent in the sea the blood of  
our own Greeks was shed.



SECOND VOICE

So deep I fell in my defeat, the centuries that  
wax and wane  
Have passed like shadows on the grave  
wherein I lie and do not know  
How many years are gone since then, how  
fares it with your sacred fane.

FIRST VOICE

I am a shade no less than you—thin rumours  
reach us here below.  
How should I tell what falls on earth and how  
the tides of battle flow?  
Yet it is said the Christians go against the  
heathen in our seat  
Though four long sullen centuries have left  
unanswered your defeat.

SECOND VOICE

There were young men who fought with me,  
who stood with me upon the walls —  
Would in this waste of empty time that some-  
where they and I could meet!

They were my brothers and my friends who  
fought to keep the city free,  
And I would take their hands again . . .  
something within me stirs and calls . . .  
O God, Whose house I fought to save, send  
back my ancient friends to me,  
They who were bound by the same bond and  
died in armour as I died!

FIRST VOICE

Who is it comes ?

SECOND VOICE

In this lone place what younger shadow wavers  
near ?  
None of my friends could find me here, the  
wastes of hell are dark and wide,  
And yet . . . and yet . . .

FIRST VOICE

Who are you ? Speak! We are two shades  
and nought to fear.

THIRD VOICE

I died a soldier.

SECOND VOICE

I as well. Come, brother, closer to my side.  
How come you, from what battlefield, what  
banners had your enemy ?

THIRD VOICE

I was a poet, I was young, a northern island  
gave me birth,  
I knew and loved my fellow-men, I knew and  
loved the lovely earth,  
Yet in my youth I married death and gave my  
life without a sigh,  
Gave all the love I bore and had, came to the  
eastern sea to die.  
My foes were yours.

SECOND VOICE

The tale is true! Still they oppose the infidel!

FIRST VOICE

God's mercy hath designed an end—speak  
on, young soldier, you speak well.  
Tell us how Christian arms again were carried  
up the Golden Horn  
And how again the Christian cross was  
planted on our citadel.

THIRD VOICE

I died before, I lay alone, my comrades  
stormed the beach and hill,  
But where the earth was red and torn, my  
wistful spirit followed still.

FIRST VOICE

I heard the thunder of that war, an unknown  
thunder strange to hear,  
Beat like a wave on Islam's shore, like doom  
within the Sultan's ear.

SECOND VOICE

O brother, speak! You died before, but still  
you saw the army go

Between the city's holy walls and drive the  
heathen from our throne.

Brother, upon those walls I fell, I fell four  
hundred years ago,

Tell me——

THIRD VOICE

Within my valley-grave I felt a peace till then  
unknown,

Happy I had not died in vain nor those who  
died away from me . . .

FIRST VOICE

He pauses and his voice is lost, the fire of  
speech is drowned with tears.

SECOND VOICE

O new companion, speak again, we have  
waited here so many years!

THIRD VOICE

In life I had loved earth so well, the ties of  
earth and flesh were strong,

And after I was laid in earth Scyros the  
island held me long,  
Till on a day the rumour came that sent me  
here below to you,  
Sickened of earth by grief and shame to know  
my childish dream untrue.

FIRST VOICE

What is the news you strive to tell? Has the  
first Mass not yet been said  
Beneath the dome where once I knelt and  
bowed a proud imperial head?

THIRD VOICE

No Christian stands beneath that dome to eat  
the bread or drink the wine,  
No Mass has there been said or sung, but  
praises in a heathen tongue  
To those who gave the Turk again the sacred  
walls of Constantine.

SECOND VOICE

We died in vain, my friends and I.



THIRD VOICE

My friends and I have died in vain.

FIRST VOICE

Nought given in the city's cause is wholly  
lost. The walls remain.

O raise your heads, my friends, and know  
that while the soaring dome shall stand.

Though heathens hold it for a space the city  
still is Christian land,

And though the years we wait be long and  
black the deed and deep the shame,

Yet still shall hope burn like a flame while  
Christian hearts and swords are strong.

O youngest friend, have peace awhile: though  
you should wait as long as we,

The life you gave was not in vain and you shall  
see the city free.

*Note.*—This poem was written in February,  
1920, on reading the announcement that  
Constantinople was to be handed back to the

Turk. The three speakers are Justinian, Constantine Palæologus and Rupert Brooke. The verbal reminiscences of Flecker are, of course, deliberate.

## CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY

HOW wonderful the world, how wonderful  
the race

That binds with rails her savage earth,  
that rides her skies,

That in the sun's inflamed or the moon's  
tranquil face

Wets her wild soil with tears and lives and  
loves and dies!

Men have not ceased from toil since first they  
went upright,

Their ships traverse the seas, their bridges  
span the streams,

They harness fire and water and create power  
and light,

They have overcome the earth in the  
intervals of dreams.

Long has their struggle been, diverse the deeds  
they do,

Harsh is their enemy, bitter the wounds  
they bear;

How many of their sons the merciless water  
slew,

How many died by fire or tumbled from  
the air ?

Still inch by painful inch the reluctant world  
is won,

The mountain's entrails pierced, the highest  
summit trod,

And against deadly rain and the uncertain sun  
Each year the crops are wrenched from  
the unwilling sod,

And houses piled on high that from earth's  
flesh are made,

Beasts bound and tamed and taught to be  
the slaves of man;

And men arise and burn with lofty hope and  
fade,

Leaving their sons advanced towards  
heaven a little span.

Yea, were not this enough, to have struggled  
with the earth,  
To have seen their fellows die by famine,  
fire, and plague,  
To have seen their women anguish in the pangs  
of birth,  
To have known all these brave souls lost  
in the lightless vague ?

But man aspires past death, hungers beyond  
the flesh,  
Dreams of he knows not what, a vast and  
shadowy thing,  
Forgets his fight with earth and strives to  
break the mesh  
Even of his own desires, and spread a huger  
wing,

Forgets his fight with earth, turns from the  
sullen foe,  
Leaves the far seas uncrossed, the forest  
still unpathed,

Lays by his spade and gazes where the high  
clouds go  
Or idly broods above the sea by moonlight  
bathed.

And strange new longings rise and vaguer  
mightier dreams  
Well in his boundless heart as now through  
timeless hours  
He hears the murmur of the bridged or un-  
bridged streams  
And sees the fields alight with a million  
burning flowers.

Yea, were not this enough? O banded  
heavens, say,  
To have added pain to pain, to have added  
dreams to toil,  
To have slaved in dreams by night as with  
his hands by day,  
To have wakened in his breast the soul's  
dark serpent-coil?



But dream breeds dream apace and covers all  
the world

With a fair image prophesying things to  
be,

And while through heaving time his fragile  
life is hurled

Audacious man hath paused and dreamt  
he may be free,

And pondering greatly thus, leapt on his  
fellow-man;

And wars have scored the earth and the sea  
drunk her fill,

And marching, ruining armies laid their  
dusty ban

On harbour, field, and barn, and lofty-  
palaced hill.

If earth had had a heart, surely that heart were  
glad

To see her pygmy foes squander their blood  
in vain,

To see her hills again in her own loose weeds  
clad,

To see the dams and dykes yield to her  
high-piled rain.

And still the contest grew, still the dream  
huger swelled

And with its wings obscured the opening  
vast abyss,

Till at the last mankind, in noblest fury held,  
Swayed like two wrestlers locked close to  
a precipice!

*October, 1918.*

## THE END

I DREAMT that I was standing in a wood  
Where the trees parted and a ride came  
through,

Not used by many, for the undergrowth,  
Saplings five inches high and nettles, spread  
Across the ruts even to the middle. And  
On either side the tall trees rose and brambles  
Looped round the heavy boles their thorny  
ropes.

Down the long track came slowly a weary  
rider.

His horse's hooves made no sound in the  
wood,

They moved so slowly. The horse was bony  
and old,

With ragged mane and tail and gnarled thin legs  
And head that drooped from the loose-hanging  
reins.

The rider was old and thin, his clothes were  
shabby,

His saddle scratched and worn, his stirrups  
dull

And pitted with rust. He held between his  
hands

Upon the saddle-bow a cup wrapped loosely  
In old discoloured rags. I could not see  
What shape it was, or whether of metal or  
glass,

But as I looked I saw the rider's eyes  
Bent burning on it. Never on the road  
He turned his gaze but still upon the cup  
He stared and still the horse walked slowly on,  
Reins hanging on its scraggy neck. I saw  
Those eyes, so fiercely still, burn on the cup  
And round them all the lines of the thin face  
Grooved by despair and shame that made a  
victory

Seem like defeat—as joyless. Then behind  
The rider came a crowd of men and women  
Who walked the track as soundlessly as he.  
Behind the brambles dizzily I stared  
And half saw some and others not at all,

But all I saw were such as every day  
Walk about city streets. There were rich  
men

Glossily dressed, and women in stale rags,  
Children with smeary faces, dowdy women,  
Fussily proper, clerks, workmen, and tramps,  
And young girls proud still of their pretty  
bodies

And young men thinking of their games and  
schoolboys

Carrying books. Thus through the wood  
they went,

Following the rider, and their trampling boots  
Fell soundless on the thick-grown track,  
their breathing

Never disturbed the dust that in the air  
Rose from the full-blown meadowsweet.

They marched

On and on unending, rank after rank,  
And still the long grass waved about their  
feet

Unbroken. In their various faces I

Could read nothing. Willing, uneager eyes  
Followed the rider, fading now from sight.  
After them in like procession came  
A cavalcade of beasts, the homely animals  
That live about our houses, dogs and cats  
And horses, and the small beasts of the fields,  
And mixed with them strange unknown  
tropical things,  
Flaming tigers and quaint-shaped burrowing  
brutes,  
Hopping, leaping, and crawling, and snakes  
and birds  
That hovered in flocks above the track and  
alighted  
And flew again, cuckoo and eagle and dove  
Mixing together. I gazed between the leaves  
And still a mist hung heavy on my eyes  
Blurring these shapes. And when they all  
were gone  
Time paused an instant. Then the trees  
seemed  
To drag their long roots slowly from the ground



And follow after, and the bushes too,  
And like a swarm of bees the smaller plants,  
Slender-stalked and starry-leafed, arose  
And from my face the screen of bramble  
boughs

Suddenly fell; and all in that strange train  
Swept onward and the earth was black and  
bare

And I was left alone, unsheltered, unshaded.  
I looked around and there was nothing left,  
No living thing, man, animal or plant  
But bleak dead earth where no wind moved,  
rain fell,

Fire burnt. And still I stood. Then there  
came slowly

On the same way a figure mountain-high  
Whose bright horns in the clouds, had there  
been clouds,

Would have projected. In his hands before  
him

He held a book, open, which he studied  
closely,

Walking on soundless feet, with downcast  
eyes.

And as he reached the spot where not my body  
But now my fleshless spirit stood in terror  
He paused and raised his head. The thunder-  
cloud eyes

Stared up into the blank and colourless  
heaven

Then down again upon the fatal page.

He closed the volume up. Then there was  
nothing.

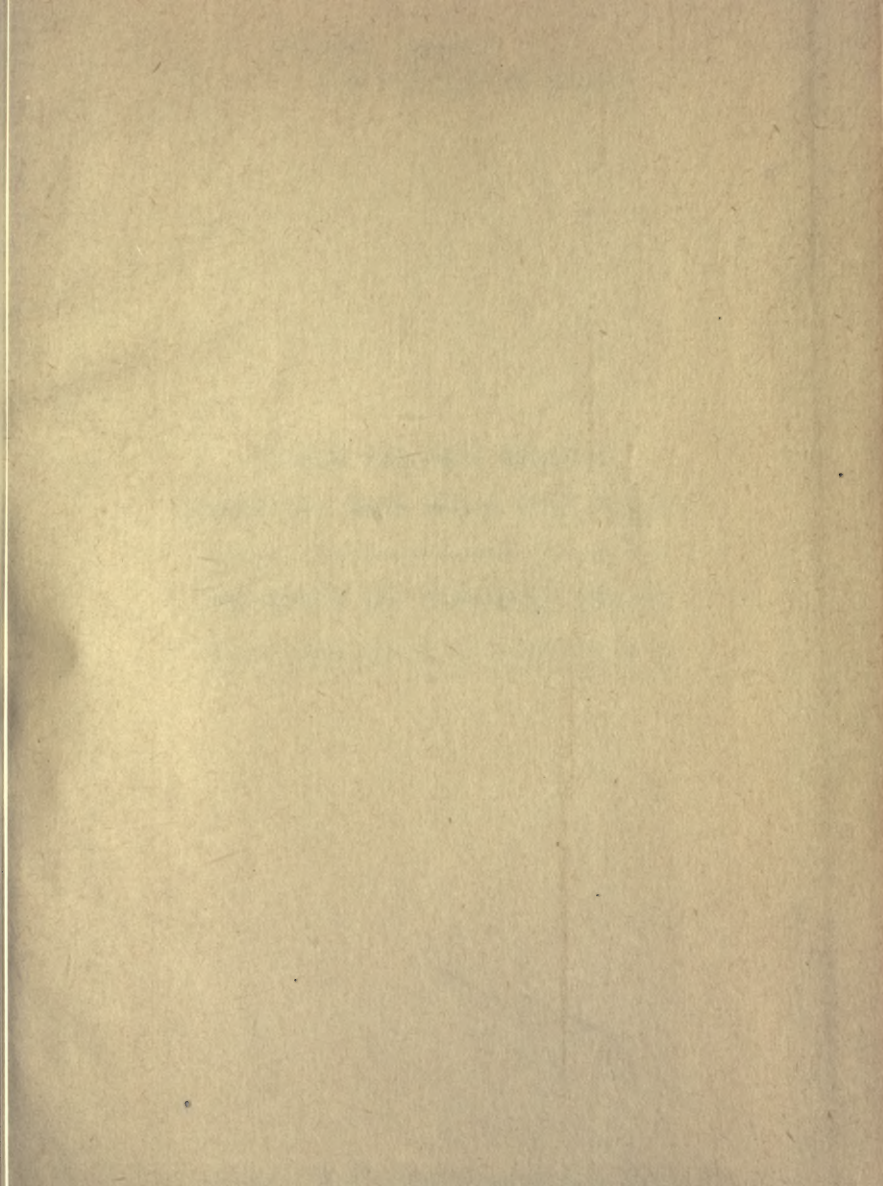
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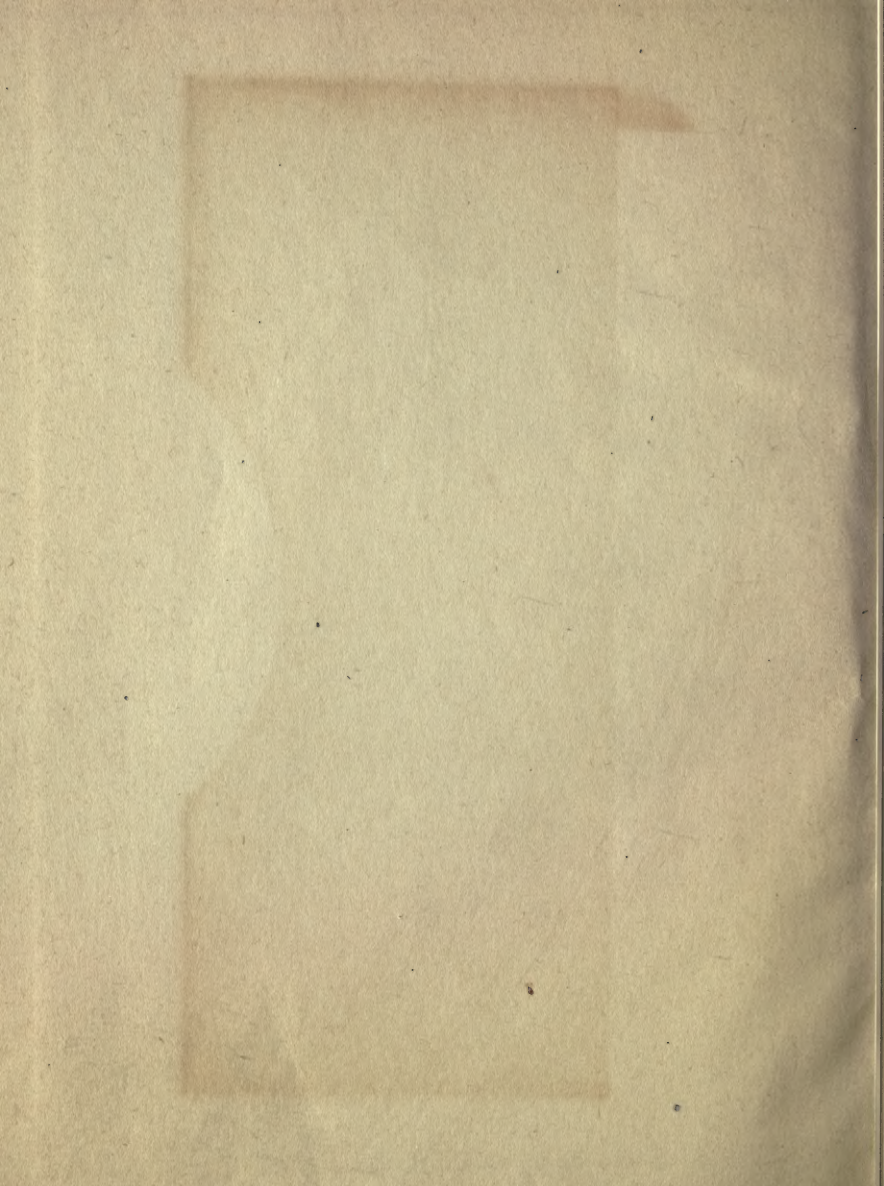












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Shanks, Edward  
The island of youth

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